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 St Louis Post - 2B  
 Date 12 Oct 1988

## A Selective Drug War

George Bush's record as vice president is difficult to separate from that of the Reagan administration generally, but in the drug war he established a record that is distinctly his own. It is a record of passive management that is long on public relations and short on achievement. Worse, it is a record that suggests a tolerance for drug trafficking even as he was ostensibly stamping it out.

In this respect, Mr. Bush's tenure as head of the South Florida Task Force on drugs was not unlike his role as head of a task force on terrorism. That task force issued a report saying governments should never make deals with terrorists — even as the White House was selling arms to Iran, a leading terrorist state.

Instead of strengthening drug interdiction forces, Mr. Bush's drug task force transferred federal personnel and equipment from stations around the country to southern Florida in an effort to at least materially reduce the flow of drugs. By the most generous calculations, the task force intercepted no more than 20 percent of the drug flow — only a slight increase from earlier efforts.

If Mr. Bush realized that the anti-drug drive was far less successful than advertised, he did not tell the American people, nor did he do anything to make it effective. In fact, he acquiesced to significant reductions in spending for drug interdiction during President Reagan's first term.

At the time Mr. Bush was presiding over a highly publicized effort to stop the drug flow, the U.S. government was tolerating the money laundering and drug dealing of

Panama's Manuel Noriega. As commander of the anti-drug task force, Mr. Bush had access to intelligence reports that it is now known, identified Mr. Noriega as a drug trafficker. Yet he professes to have known nothing of Mr. Noriega's alleged drug dealing until the Panamanian was indicted.

Similarly, he has denied knowing anything of the drug smuggling of some members of the Contras or of the illegal U.S. operation to supply the rebels with weapons. If he didn't learn of either of these activities from readily available intelligence reports, he might have asked his national security adviser, Donald Gregg, who maintained regular contact with several of those involved in the gun-running.

The vice president's detached approach to his responsibilities in the anti-drug campaign is consistent with his role in the Iran arms deal. Though he attended many meetings relating to the arms-for-hostages deal, none of the other participants can remember Mr. Bush's having spoken up. He now says the deal was a mistake, thereby dismissing an enterprise that offended both the law and ethics as a mere miscalculation. More important, he has never said whether he believes a president has the right to embrace one policy in public while practicing another in secret and to circumvent the law.

Do Americans want a leader who, by his silence, implies he feels the president is above the law? Do they want a leader who sacrificed the future of hundreds of thousands of Americans to drugs, so that the U.S. could overthrow the government of an impoverished country in Central America?